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SUBJECT: FEAR AND INTIMIDATION EVIDENT IN MURDER CASE OF BRAZILIAN LABOR INSPECTORS

REF: A. A) RIO 1001

[B. B\)](#) RIO 111

[C. C\)](#) RIO 90

[D. D\)](#) BRASILIA 248

[E. E\)](#) RIO 1287

[¶1.](#) (SBU) INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: In an October 15, 2004 meeting with poloff, a Brazilian Ministry of Labor (MOL) Inspection Counselor agreed with recent press reports that finger local agricultural magnates in the January 28, 2004 assassination of three MOL labor inspectors and their driver near the rural city of Unai, Minas Gerais (reftels). Stepping beyond views expressed by the media, MOL Inspection Counselor Marcelo Campos speculated that tax evasion could have been the principal motive, since relatively low labor-related fines were hardly worth a crime of this scale. When separately interviewed by poloffs on October 25, 2004 the Labor Inspector responsible for Unai was more circumspect, characterizing the evidence in the case to date as "circumstantial." Despite her denials and repeated professions of faith in higher powers, poloffs sensed that fear and intimidation played a role in her evasiveness. The major suspects in the killings are currently in custody and awaiting trial in the state capital of Belo Horizonte. END SUMMARY

TAX EVASION A POTENTIAL MOTIVE?

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[¶2.](#) (SBU) In an October 15, 2004 meeting in Brasilia, Ministry of Labor (MOL) Inspection Counselor Marcelo Campos shared his views about the murder of three MOL inspectors and their driver in January 2004. The four were ambushed in their car on a rural road in western Minas Gerais state, near the small town of Unai. Campos concurred with recent indictments that placed responsibility for the killings on local Unai agriculture magnate Norberto Manica, a longtime violator of Brazilian labor laws. An indictment has also been issued against his brother Anterio, who was recently elected mayor of Unai in spite of his bad press. Characterizing the Unai region as "lawless," Campos was unflinching in his belief that Norberto Manica was guilty and asserted that the government possessed "robust proof" to that effect. Going beyond all previously released information, Campos speculated that Manica feared the inspectors would discover tax evasion in which penalties would far exceed fines levied for labor violations.

[¶3.](#) (SBU) According to Campos, the murder case is currently being handled by a federal court in Belo Horizonte, the state capital. Eight indictments have already been issued against Norberto Manica, the alleged triggermen, and their accomplices. The suspects (save Anterio Manica) await trial at a detention facility in Belo Horizonte. As an elected official, Anterio Manica will be tried by the federal Superior Court of Justice in Brasilia. He was recently freed pending further investigation concerning the scope of his involvement.

EVASIVENESS AND FEAR

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[¶4.](#) (SBU) Unlike Campos, MOL Chief Inspector in charge of the region (including Unai) Dalia Maria Chaves Ulhoa was evasive and offered little substantive information about the case when interviewed on October 25, 2004 in her Paracatu office. Paracatu is a small town that sits approximately 90 km away from Uani in rural Minas Gerais. When asked whether tax evasion could have prompted the killings, Ulhoa instead declared that a "lack of love and understanding" along with a "capital-labor mismatch" were the causes. Ulhoa acknowledged that she herself was a suspect in the investigation and emphatically dismissed the accusation as "slander." Pressed for more information, Ulhoa emphasized her faith in divine forces and evaded any reference to the pertinent facts of the case. The Labor Inspector admitted she had received death threats and now traveled to Unai only with police escort. Denying she was personally afraid, Ulhoa asserted that her faith kept her going.

[¶5.](#) (SBU) COMMENT: Despite Chief Inspector Ulhoa's professions of faith, her seeming unwillingness to provide

direct answers suggests fear -- in sharp contrast with the Brasilia-based Campos, whose distance from agricultural magnates in Unai granted him the ability to speak frankly. Federal jurisdiction over the case has allowed it to come closer to resolution by removing it from the "lawless" hinterlands where, as poloffs observed, fear often trumps justice. END COMMENT

¶6. (U) AmConsulRio and poloff Kathleen List provided information and support for this report.

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